

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

The Mind of the Seeker

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

EVEN when I was a child, it was not my nature to sit back and watch people suffer.

I think this came naturally to me by watching the way my father and grandfather lived. When I became a young man, I embraced whatever I saw or heard that I thought would help me help people. Eventually, this led me to my encounter with the Lotus Sutra.

The opening verse for sutra recitation that is chanted in Nichiren Buddhism includes the phrase, "Everything that we see, hear, touch, and know brings us closer to awakening."

But just experiencing life aimlessly will not bring you closer to awakening. Instead, you must live every day with a clearly defined goal for your life, and seek it in earnest. Then you will discover the answers you are looking for, one after another, in the books you read, within the words of those you meet, and in every single thing you encounter. I think this is similar to how a magnet attracts and scoops up iron sand out of regular sand.

In contrast, people who seek no higher purpose in life do not gain a single thing, even if they find themselves surrounded by a mountain of treasures.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 22–23

Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

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The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.



President's Message

People Who Bring Joy to Others

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

What Is “Transcendent Power”?

A wondrous power that transcends human knowledge is often referred to as a “transcendent power,” which we usually think of as a special ability that we ourselves cannot attain. It’s no wonder that we think this, since Buddhist scripture states that incredible abilities like “being able to see all things in every realm” and “emitting brilliant light from every pore of the body that illuminates the world” are due to transcendent powers.

I do not think, however, that Shakyamuni expounded anything that we ourselves cannot do. In that case, what is the meaning of the “transcendent powers” referred to in the scripture?

In my understanding, the greatest transcendent power of human beings is that we have minds. In other words, the human mind is a transcendent power. Because we have minds, we understand the feelings of other people—we can understand what they are seeking. Because we have minds, we are able to comprehend the truth revealed to us by Shakyamuni.

Founder Niwano said, “If you get wisdom, in the true sense, through the Mahayana teachings, that’s the same as gaining transcendent power.” What he meant is that instead of assuming that transcendent power is some extraordinary ability, we should say that the everyday functioning of the mind exerts a power that can be called transcendent when it’s used to show consideration for others. For example, many Rissho Kosei-kai members say that thanks to the support of friends who know the Buddha’s teachings and have grown close to them, they have been born anew while living the same life. Indeed, sometimes we can only use the word “amazing” to respond to these changes of heart—they show us that our minds are capable of anything.

This is also proven by the ruthless murderer Angulimala, who, through the care and guidance of Shakyamuni, became one of Shakyamuni’s foremost disciples. So, transcendent power is also sincerity in the part of the mind that thinks of other people, and the power released through that part as it functions.

Happiness Is Bringing Joy to Others

Once when I was talking about transcendent powers, someone said, “Kosei-kai is full of people who demonstrate transcendent power through their sincerity,” and I certainly believe that is true. This is because, according to chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra (“The Transcendent Powers of the Tathagata”), transcendent powers are used to bring people joy. To quote from that chapter, the buddhas, “in order to bring joy to living beings, / Demonstrate their immeasurable transcendent powers.” Therefore, it is important to interact with others cheerfully, kindly, and warmly, and to make every effort to care for them. If you bring them even a little joy by putting into practice your consideration for them, it is none other than the demonstration of your transcendent power.

Incidentally, manga artist Takashi Yanase (1919–2013), who was best known as the creator of the *Anpanman* series, wrote in his book *Mo hitotsu no Anpanman monogatari* [Another story of Anpanman] that “the greatest / joy / is bringing others / joy.” He elaborated on this by saying that people are happiest when they make others happy, that the greatest pleasure in life is to please people, and that he became a manga artist because he wanted to give his all to making people happy. When I read this, I felt that this man was a bodhisattva who brought people joy through his manga and, at the same time, taught us that if we’re dedicated to a way of life that makes others happy, we can all become bodhisattvas right where we are.

Even someone who is bedridden can bring joy to others by smiling and offering words of gratitude—this, too, is a transcendent power and the work of a bodhisattva.

As the final verse of chapter 21 states, people who share the Dharma in this way “cause countless bodhisattvas / To at last abide in the One Vehicle.” We are, each and every one of us, building a world in which everyone can live together in harmony. I hope that Rissho Kosei-kai will always be full of people who, at all times, with heartfelt sincerity, are happy to make others happy.

From *Kosei*, February 2021

Spiritual Journey

A True Way of Liberation Lies in the Bodhisattva Practice

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Great Sacred Hall on December 15, 2020, during the ceremony celebrating the monthly memorial day for Shakyamuni Buddha.

GOOD morning, everyone. I was born in 1960 to the Akagawa family in Yokote City, Akita Prefecture, as the oldest son of three siblings (my two older sisters and myself). I represent the third generation of my family to belong to Rissho Kosei-kai. This year I was able to celebrate my sixtieth birthday, and I'm pleased to have this opportunity to give a Dharma Journey talk at a turning point in my life, thanks to the deep compassion of the Buddha. It's as if the Buddha is saying to me, "Be grateful that you were born into a family of the faith in the Dharma and grew up with the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. Make a firm determination as a bodhisattva to devote yourself to disseminating the Dharma."

Looking back on my life, it was my father who led me to the faith. In "Ichijo seppo" [the One-Vehicle discourses], an article in the October 2, 2005, issue of Rissho Kosei-kai's newspaper *Kosei Shimbun*, my father said the following in an interview:

"In December 1988, I attended the graduation ceremony of Gakurin Seminary for my son. At the celebration held in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall, as I poured some sake for Founder Niwano, he told me about my son, who would soon begin working as a staff member for Rissho Kosei-kai. He said, 'We will take good care of your son. Your son is a young man who earnestly seeks the Dharma.' After returning home, I reflected on the words of the Founder and made up my mind to deepen my study of the Dharma. I reflected on how I had caused a lot of trouble to my family by drinking, and I was able to give up drinking from then on. I am still filled with gratitude to the Founder for giving me the opportunity to reflect on my own attitude through my son."

When I read this article again in memory of my father, who passed away in 2012 at the age of eighty, I realized that my family reached a turning point of changing our karma in 1988, the year I became a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

My grandfather was the first to follow the Rissho Kosei-kai faith in my family. He was a devoted practitioner who served as the first clerical supervisor of the Yokote Dharma Center. My grandparents adopted my mother as a child, and when she became an adult, she married my father, who was also adopted. My father ran a construction business and made his living as a carpenter and craftsman. My father, who had a strong sense of responsibility, often had conflicts with his adoptive father and would let out his anger violently with the help of alcohol. When I was in junior high and high school, I didn't understand what was going on with him—I just saw him as a pathetic father who couldn't help himself. However, although I didn't realize it then, that experience connected me to Buddhist teachings and motivated me to seek liberation in the Dharma.



Rev. Akagawa delivers his Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo.

As a teenager, I believed that the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai were for the liberation of all people and the attainment of buddhahood for the whole family. Therefore, I didn't understand why the atmosphere at home was always so tense, even though my family had faith in Rissho Kosei-kai. I wondered how long my mother would have to suffer from my father's drinking. Then I wondered what the Founder would say to help us. I made a wish, thinking to myself, "If I can get my family to return to normal by learning the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I want to do so as soon as possible." That wish grew stronger day by day.

I began to look for ways to bring happiness back to my family. I thought the best way to do this was to go to the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo and hear the teachings of the Founder in person, so my sister and I joined a group pilgrimage there. In the autumn of 1978, the Founder was speaking from this very spot where I am standing right now, in the Great Sacred Hall filled with members from all over Japan. Even just looking at him from afar, I felt a sense of serenity come over me.

That day, I had a wondrous experience. The participants in the group pilgrimage were given an impromptu tour of the Horin-kaku Guest Hall before heading home. When I entered the main hall and stood in front of the statue of the Thousand-Armed Kannon, it was so divine that my whole body froze and I stood there as if I had been struck by lightning.

Not long after, I heard someone speaking directly to my heart. The voice said, "You don't have to worry even a little about your sufferings. Don't worry about your family, just come to my side. I will always care about you." The voice was warm and it seemed to penetrate deep into my heart.

"What is this? Who are you?" I asked. My heart filled with a level of joy I had never before experienced, and my eyes welled up with tears of gratitude. I didn't know what was going on and my mind was confused, but the power of the words overwhelmed me and I replied in my mind, "I understand. I will come to your side."

Although it all happened within just a few minutes, this wondrous experience determined my path as a lifelong member of Rissho Kosei-kai. After graduating from university, I spent two years as a teacher at a prefectural high school in my hometown, and then I decided to study at Gakurin Seminary. On the day of graduation from Gakurin, as introduced in "Ichijo seppo," my father gave up drinking after his encounter with the Founder and a warm light once again shone into my family after many years of suffering.

Years later, I had an opportunity to have this wondrous experience heard by the Founder. With a big smile, the Founder said, "It's called the practice of the shravaka. That's not something everyone can experience. You've had a great experience."

I was curious about this "practice of the shravaka" that the Founder mentioned, and I repeatedly revisited the phrase to try and understand what the Founder wanted to tell me. In Rissho Kosei-kai, we are taught that the core of liberation lies in performing the bodhisattva practice in the spirit of "putting others first," for the benefit of both ourselves and others. But at that time, I was obsessed with my family's suffering caused by my father's drinking and the wondrous experience I had during the group pilgrimage. The Founder warmly accepted all of me even though my mind wasn't quite on the right track.

After a long time, I finally came to understand the Founder's meaning: he wanted me to realize that the solution to my sufferings did not lie in the practice of the shravaka that seeks my own liberation, but in the compassionate bodhisattva practice for the benefit of others.

Going back in time a little, just before I entered Gakurin Seminary, I had experienced tests on my faith. In a short period of time, my heart was shattered by a series of events: the high school where I was teaching was destroyed by a fire, my brother-in-law—whom I was close to—died suddenly, and the high mortgage on my family's house was revealed to me. I began to think that entering Gakurin Seminary was not what the Buddha had in store for me, and I considered declining the opportunity.

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Around that time, I received a call from Rev. Kenji Hayashi, the minister of my Dharma center. He told me that I had been called upon by the headquarters—they wanted to meet with me. When I went to the designated place, I found Rev. Kazuhiro Baba and Rev. Masako Otaki, then members of Rissho Kosei-kai's Board of Trustees, waiting for me. Referring to chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, "Teachers of the Dharma," they explained the significance of being born in this world as a human being and the rarity of having encountered the Dharma and having karmic ties with the Founder.

Thanks to their guidance, my waning heart regained strength. All this was made possible by the earnest prayers and deep compassion of Rev. Hayashi, who arranged for me to study in the seminary. I was deeply grateful for the reverend, who was always trying to liberate my family from our difficulties.

After graduating from Gakurin Seminary, I was assigned to work in external relations, which gave me the valuable experience of working toward interfaith cooperation for peace—the groundwork of which the Founder had established. Then, in December 2015, I was appointed minister of the Meguro Dharma Center in Tokyo. At that point I had been working in the field of interreligious dialogue and collaboration for almost thirty years, so my new role on the front line of Dharma dissemination made me feel anxious about the heavy responsibility.

On my first day at the Meguro Dharma Center as the new minister, I was guided by Rev. Kazuo Chiba, then director of the West Tokyo Division, to the inauguration ceremony. As I walked into the hall, I was welcomed by the radiant smiles of the members who filled it. In an instant, my anxiety was blown away and I felt courage welling up within me as I thought about how I was going to begin my practice with them.

A few days later, I arrived at the Dharma center early in the morning and found myself standing before the entrance door, unable to enter the building. It was just because the power switch of the automatic door had not yet been turned on, but the fact that the door did not open made me aware of an important thing: that there are many people in the world who are

not accepted by anyone even when they ask for help, or who continue to suffer because they do not yet know the Dharma.

This experience gave me an objective: to leave the gates of the Meguro Dharma Center wide open to all people. Thanks to the great efforts of Rev. Takayo Yamazaki, the first minister of the Dharma center, as well as to the successive ministers and leaders throughout the sixty-one years since its inauguration, the Meguro Dharma Center has actively developed its human resources and dissemination activities. In addition, various other activities it has organized in cooperation with local religious leaders have firmly taken root.

This year, my fifth year as minister, has been a troubling but, in a sense, productive one due to the spread of COVID-19. As President Niwano said in his guidance at the beginning of the year, "seeking the way in daily life in the spirit of 'This place is indeed the place of the Way'" became my daily task of diligence. This practice has enabled me to see things in my daily routine that I had taken for granted. It has also awakened me to a sense of gratitude toward the fact that I have been supported by many people.

I learned that both our Dharma centers and we members should be more flexible so we can adapt to the new way of life needed to overcome the coronavirus pandemic. The Meguro Dharma Center started to use social networking services through which members can exchange learnings from the faith and encourage one another even though they can't meet in person. In addition, we created a "Flag of Life" to show our support for medical professionals and other people who are keeping our social life from breaking down and put it at the gate of the Dharma center. Also, by consulting the head of the men's group and other leaders of the Dharma center, we started a phone counseling service for people who lost their homes in the coronavirus catastrophe. Furthermore, in light of the current situation in the Meguro area, where there are frequent cases of urban crime and child abuse, we held a memorial service for those who lost their lives. In the process, we have become convinced that we

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need to go into the community to help more people connect with the Dharma so that such sad incidents can be prevented as much as possible.

This month, I transitioned into my role as the new director of Rissho Kosei-kai International. Because of the pandemic, I couldn't say goodbye and express my appreciation for each of the Meguro Dharma Center members in person. But I firmly believe that I will be able to repay my debt of gratitude to them by doing my best with my new responsibilities, and by keeping the lessons I've learned on dissemination as my lifelong treasure.

In concluding my talk, I express my resolution to dedicate myself to Dharma practice by engraving in my mind the teaching that I was able to learn thanks to my late father: that a true way of liberation and the solution to suffering lies in the devotional bodhisattva practice. Thank you all very much for your kind attention.



Rev. Akagawa visits the Ulaanbaatar chapter in Mongolia as minister of the Meguro Dharma Center in 2019.

The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 22 The Entrustment

The Joy in Being Entrusted and the Happiness in the Face of a Difficult Task Ahead

In this chapter, Shakyamuni lays his hand upon the heads of all the bodhisattvas and entrusts them with the great work of transmitting the treasured enlightenment to people in ages to come, calling on them to expound the Dharma single-mindedly, thereby benefiting them far and wide. This has been called the “general entrustment” since ancient times.

In response, the bodhisattvas are filled with the highest joy, and they declare their determination three times as they happily undertake the difficult task ahead. We must note this well, for it is the prime point of this chapter: we latter-day bodhisattvas must take to heart this joy in being entrusted and remember to feel happiness in the face of a difficult task ahead.

Once Again at the Assembly on Divine Eagle Peak

With this chapter, the Buddha’s teaching in the Lotus Sutra completes a major stage. With the close of this chapter, the sutra’s most significant part, which describes the Buddha’s infinite life and the merits of believing it, is concluded. A curtain is drawn on the portion of the Lotus Sutra that has played out on the stage of an idyllic scene (the sky), and the story once again returns to the scene of reality (Divine Eagle Peak).





The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 23 The Former Deeds of the Bodhisattva Medicine King

Bodhisattvas Are the Models for Living Beings

The teaching so far has made the truth clear; now we come to the matter of real practice. It is a special difficulty for the ordinary person to know how to get everyday action to square with a lofty truth. There is no better way to do this than to observe and follow the example of the bodhisattvas, who are but one step removed from being perfect buddhas and who stand for particularly fine forms of virtue or exemplary action.

Living beings are best encouraged to right action by models close to them, and this and the next few chapters are essentially presentations of these models or examples.

Dedicated Practice Is the Highest Form of Offering

The first figure to appear in this chapter is the Bodhisattva Medicine King, who vowed to heal the sicknesses of humankind. This bodhisattva's dedication and self-sacrifice in a former life are described in order to show him as a virtuous model of veneration of the Buddha and his Dharma.

In his former life, the Medicine King had been a bodhisattva named the Bodhisattva Delight to Behold for All Living Beings. In serving a buddha called Virtue of the Pure Light of the Sun and the Moon, he heard the truth of the Dharma Flower Sutra. Through twelve thousand years of ardent practice, he attained the Samadhi of Appearing in Any Physical Form. Using transcendent powers, he caused the heavens to rain flowers and incense as an offering of veneration—an expression of devotion and gratitude for the Buddha Virtue of the Pure Light of the Sun and the Moon and his teaching of the Dharma Flower Sutra. The Bodhisattva Delight to Behold for All Living Beings wished, however, to make yet a greater offering with his body, and so, after ingesting fragrant oils and anointing his body, he set himself on fire and burned for twelve hundred years. The light of his burning illuminated the entire world.

When this offering was complete, the bodhisattva was reborn as a prince to the king in the domain of the Buddha Virtue of the Pure Light of the Sun and the Moon. As soon as he was born, he paid homage to the buddha, who announced that he would enter nirvana that night, and that he entrusted the prince to spread the Buddha's Dharma throughout the world. The buddha then entered nirvana.

The Bodhisattva Delight to Behold for All Living Beings wept, cremated the buddha's body, gathered the relics, made eighty-four thousand precious urns, and erected eighty-four thousand stupas throughout the state. Still dissatisfied with his offering, he burned his arms, which were already aglow with stunning virtue. The light of this fire kindled worthy spirits in many who saw it, but after seventy-two thousand years, people lamented to see that their great leader had lost both arms.

Then the Bodhisattva Delight to Behold for All Living Beings announced that although he had given up his arms, he was assured that he would attain everlasting life. As soon as he made this announcement, his arms spontaneously reappeared.





We may summarize the lessons from this story in two major points. First, there is no greater human quality than self-sacrifice. Second, the greatest offering we can make on behalf of the teachings is actual practice.



The Ten Similes Praising the Lotus Sutra and Spreading the Dharma

After the story of the Bodhisattva Delight to Behold for All Living Beings, we have the so-called “ten similes praising the Lotus Sutra,” which signify just how wonderful the Lotus Sutra is. Subsequently, Shakyamuni explains the various merits that each practitioner of the Lotus Sutra receives.

In this way, Shakyamuni first causes our hearts to open to the Lotus Sutra. Then, he strongly proclaims that it is precisely in the age of the decline of the Dharma that we should spread the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, saying: “In the last five-hundred-year period after my passing, proclaim and spread it broadly in Jambudvīpa so that it will never be lost. Ensure that Mara, the mara followers, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, kumbhandas, and others have no chance to stop it.”

The age of the decline of the Dharma definitely indicates the present day. We who live in the age of the decline of the Dharma have an important mission to spread the Lotus Sutra that is the supreme and most sublime teaching. In this chapter, Shakyamuni directly entrusts us with this mission.

This is an English translation of text that originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016]), pp. 198–203.





Director's Column

Everything Is the Buddha's Message

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

WE usually understand “transcendent powers” to be supernatural abilities that bring us to various imaginary worlds. Now that we live in a digital society and often get lost amid a massive amount of information, it seems difficult to have the sensitivity needed to appreciate the wonders of life as we navigate our everyday routines.

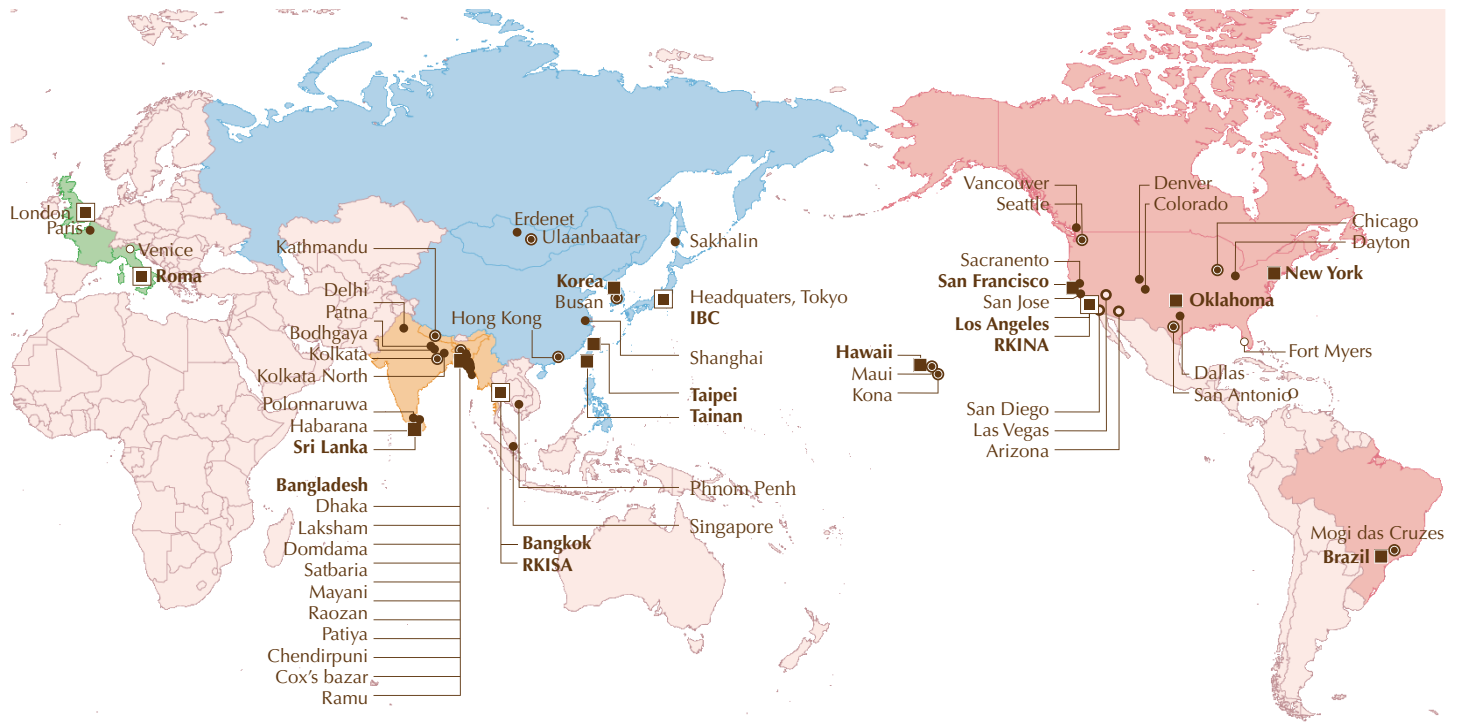
In chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra (“The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata”), the Buddha addresses the assembly by saying, “I always abide here teaching the Dharma.” This passage tells us that this world is filled with the compassionate messages of the Buddha, who desires to enhance the lives of all beings. Our hearts and minds are receptors of these messages.

It may not be wrong to say that transcendent powers are the abilities we acquire when we achieve a selfless mind that is at one with the benevolent minds of the gods and the buddhas who care for all living beings. When we leave behind our egocentric minds and grow close to people with a sincere heart, we may be able to say that an unimaginable realm of divine protection will manifest.

As indicated in the President's Message for this month, let each of us become a person who shares the Dharma through our practice. Let us continue to build a world “in which everyone can live together in harmony.” May our prayers be grounded in the minds of devotion that resonate with the minds of the gods and the buddhas.



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